

WASHINGTON, DC -- The House of Representatives passed H. Res. 812 today by a vote of 421-0. The resolution, authored by Congresswoman Linda Sánchez (D-Lakewood), expresses the sympathy and support of the House of Representatives and the people of the United States for the victims of the devastating flooding in southern Mexico. Rep. Sánchez gave the following speech on the floor of the House yesterday in support of H. Res. 812.

"I first want to thank the distinguished Chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Congressman Lantos, and the distinguished Ranking Member Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, for supporting this important resolution that I am offering today.

"The U.S. has had its share of natural disasters recently, from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005 to this year's southern California wildfires, some of which are still burning. As we have learned, it is difficult even for the United States, the richest nation in the world, to adequately care for our victims and rebuild our communities.

"In both of those disasters, our neighbor was there to help us, with emergency relief units and firefighters. Now Mexico faces the challenge of a devastating natural disaster within its own borders.

"This resolution recognizes the plight of our Mexican neighbors and expresses our desire and commitment to support Mexico during one of the worst natural disasters in its history. A disaster which the country's president has described as one of the worst not only because of the size of the area affected, "but because of the number of people affected."

"As many Americans already know, a series of storms brought torrential rainfall to southern Mexico, especially the states of Tabasco and Chiapas, causing various rivers to overflow their banks.

"At least half a million people's homes have been damaged or destroyed, and perhaps double that number are without utilities or cut off from transportation routes.

"In the State of Tabasco, 100% of the agricultural crops have been lost and 80% of the state is under water.

"Truly, this is a disaster of epic proportions. In this agricultural area, even those who were able to stay safe during the storm will face so many challenges.

"Having lost their crops, which are for many their only source of income, surviving and keeping their families fed and intact will be difficult.

"In addition to picking up the pieces of their lives after losing homes and crops, the flood survivors face increased threats from diseases like malaria, dengue fever, and cholera.

"As a good neighbor, it is imperative that we do all that we can to help Mexico ensure that the flood victims can indeed get back on their feet.

“It is the least we can do for a neighbor who did what it could, with its modest means, to help us in our times of need.

“I also want to take a moment to commend Mexican President Felipe Calderon for leading his country's rapid response to this devastation and for his work before the rains fell to avert an even greater catastrophe.

“Two days before the most damaging floods hit, amid heavy rains, President Calderon ordered in thousands of soldiers, marines, and pilots. When the riverbanks finally burst, inundating some 70% of the city of Villahermosa, there were more than 60 helicopters ready to carry out nonstop rescue and relief missions.

“President Calderon and his cabinet have been active on the ground, giving televised updates on everything from how to use satellite phones in shelters to the drop points of millions of bottles of water.

“The President's swift reaction is impressive, and I applaud his efforts.

“This resolution expresses the empathy of the U.S. House of Representatives during this time and pledges our continued assistance.

“We applaud the prompt humanitarian response of the Mexican government, international organizations, and relief bodies. We must continue to support these efforts as long as they are necessary.

“I urge my colleagues not only to support this resolution, but to work together to ensure that its goals are realized. I urge us to continue to work in a bi-partisan manner to address this humanitarian crisis. We must not just speak of our good intentions, we must act on them.

“We must immediately make assistance available to Mexican authorities so that Mexico can continue to provide relief aid to the victims as the effects of the flooding continue to unfold.

“I strongly urge my Colleagues to support this resolution.”